

# Using Educator Preparation Provider Data to Inform Program Approval and Improve Program Efficacy

## SLDS WEBINAR SUMMARY

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As their education data systems mature, some states are exploring ways to strengthen collaboration between postsecondary education preparation providers (EPPs) that train future teachers and the state education agencies where they will one day work. The Tennessee Department of Education has built multiple data tools that both inform the state's EPP accreditation and approval process and help EPPs evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their programs based on how their graduates perform as professional educators.

Representatives from the Tennessee Department of Education and two Tennessee EPPs discuss how these tools allow for evidence-based program evaluation and how EPPs are using data to improve how they train future educators.

### Tennessee's EPP Approval Process and Data Tools

Tennessee is home to nearly 40 EPPs operated by a variety of organizations, from large research universities to small private colleges and, in one case, a public school district. Every 7 years, EPPs undergo a comprehensive review by the Tennessee Department

of Education, which then recommends EPPs for continuing approval by the Tennessee State Board of Education. Comprehensive reviews evaluate each EPP's overall performance as well as each specialized licensure program that it offers.

Although the EPP approval process is required by the state, the Tennessee Department of Education wanted to ensure that its comprehensive reviews supported continuous improvement for EPPs as well as accountability. With its 2015 Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant, the department began drawing more of its own data into the process to create tools to better evaluate EPP performance as well as help them improve the quality of new teachers across the state.

### *Incorporating data into the EPP approval process*

The Tennessee Department of Education's comprehensive review for EPPs is based on a number of national and state standards, including from the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) and Tennessee's own literacy standards. The review process involves a significant qualitative evaluation, for which EPPs offer narrative responses

FIGURE 1. The Tennessee Department of Education’s annual Performance Reports score each of the state’s EPPs on several domains related to teaching candidates’ success.



and documentation to show how their programs align with the standards. The Tennessee Department of Education collects this information and assembles additional quantitative data for the review through its TNAtlas portal. Together, the qualitative and quantitative components enable a review process that meets state needs, clarifies expectations for EPPs, and supports systems thinking and continuous improvement.

The Tennessee Department of Education’s Annual Reports for EPPs provide critical performance data each year that inform the EPP review and approval process as well as individual EPPs’ program planning and evaluation in between the 7-year reviews. The Annual Reports include two distinct components: the Performance Report and the Insights Tool.

The **Performance Report** scores each EPP in four domains—Candidate Recruitment and Selection, Employment and Retention, Candidate Assessment, and Completer Effectiveness and Impact—and offers an overall assessment of whether the provider exceeds,

meets, or does not meet expectations (**FIGURE 1**). A fifth domain—Completer, Employer, and Partner Satisfaction—will be added in the future. Scores in each domain are based on EPP performance on three to six metrics with thresholds developed by a working group of educator preparation stakeholders.

The Tennessee Department of Education incorporates these performance data into its 7-year comprehensive review for EPPs. Providers with challenges identified in the comprehensive review undergo an additional focused review to address specific areas of deficiency.

If an EPP’s Performance Report shows it failing to meet expectations for overall performance for 2 consecutive years, the EPP must undergo an interim review (**FIGURE 2** on page 3). EPPs closely examine the performance data in their Annual Reports to identify underlying issues and develop an action plan to correct them. The Tennessee Department of Education works closely with the EPP to approve the action plan and monitor progress toward completing it.

FIGURE 2. EPPs that fail to meet expectations in their annual Performance Reports for 2 consecutive years undergo an interim review process to identify and address underlying issues with their programs.

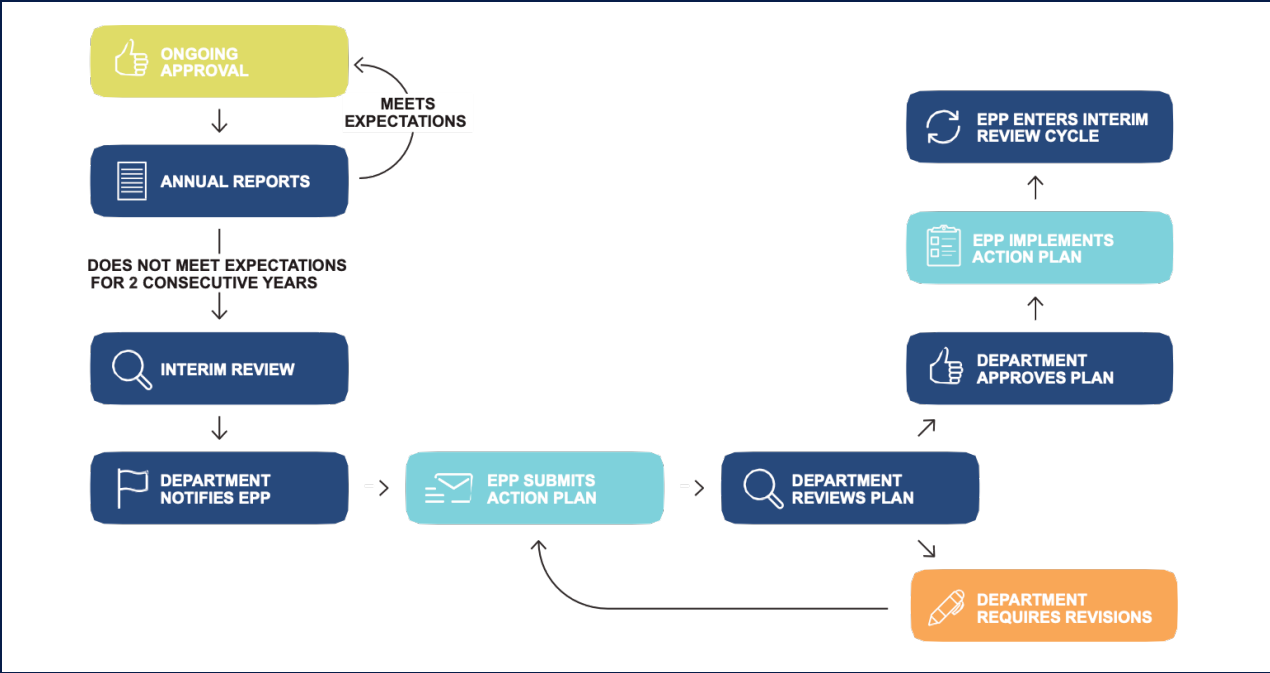
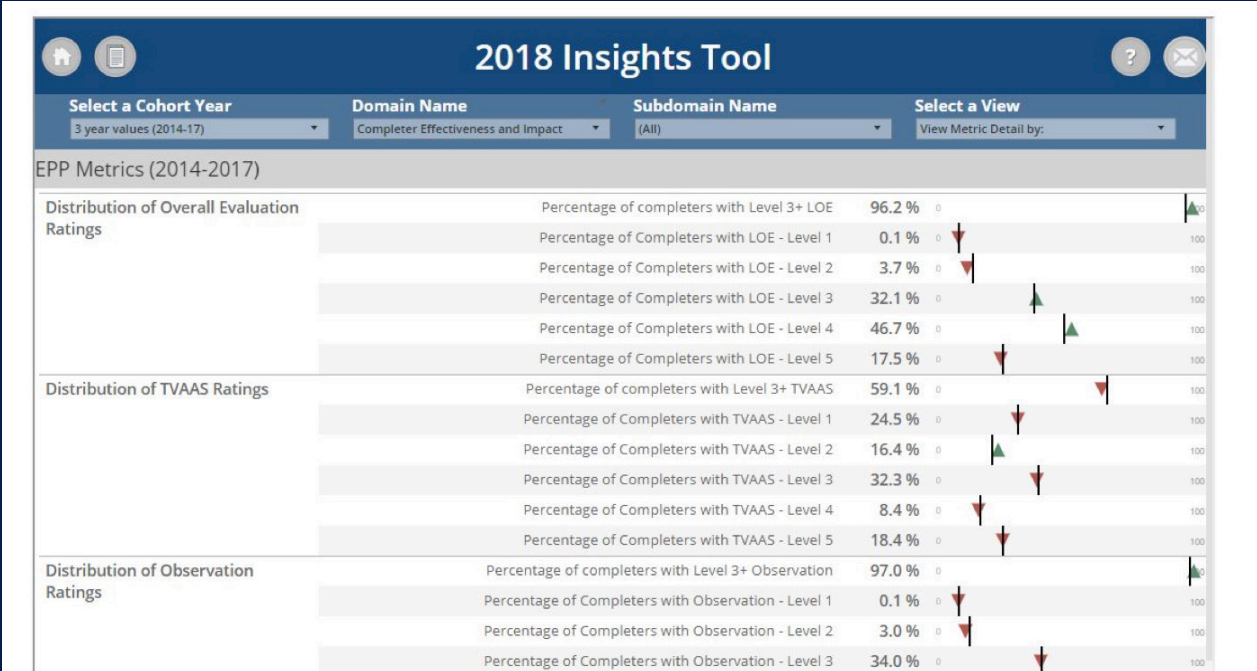


FIGURE 3. The interactive Insights Tool shows EPP users detailed performance data for their programs over time. Performance data include measures of program completers' success as educators based on evaluations, data from the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS), and classroom observations. Black lines in the right-hand column show state average scores, and colored markers indicate whether the EPP performed above or below the state average.



## *Supporting continuous improvement for EPPs*

The second part of the Tennessee Department of Education's Annual Reports, the **Insights Tool**, allows EPPs to dig more deeply into their performance data to help evaluate and improve their programs. EPP users can filter their provider's performance data by domain, undergraduate and graduate program or endorsement area, and program design type for different cohorts of teaching candidates over time (**FIGURE 3** on page 3). The Insights Tool is designed to give EPPs actionable data to understand and strengthen their programs both when undergoing comprehensive and interim reviews and when assessing their offerings internally.

### **Milligan College: Taking Action With State Data**

Milligan College is a liberal arts institution in northeastern Tennessee with about 1,200 students. About 50 students graduate each year from the education department's bachelor's, master's, education specialist, and doctoral degree programs.

#### *Insights from state data*

Milligan College relies on state data from the TNAtlas Annual Reports to provide multiple measures of effectiveness and insight beyond the data that the college collects itself. The state data give the college more indicators of whether its programs are working and highlight areas for improvement.

In 2014–2015, the college received the lowest category of performance rating on Tennessee's state report card for EPPs. Milligan College relied on its internal, four-step quality assurance system to address challenges revealed by state performance data. The steps of the quality assurance system—planning, implementation, analysis, and adjustment—helped college leaders and faculty evaluate weaker elements of its programs and make improvements.

One issue identified in the college's quality assurance review was that the dispositions rubric used to evaluate the attitudes and behaviors of teaching candidates needed to be refocused. The existing rubric covered professional skills such as punctuality, appropriate dress, and completing assignments on time, but it did not assess broader attitudes such as promoting equitable access to education and getting to know students.

College leaders began redesigning the rubric based on national standards for teaching behavior and

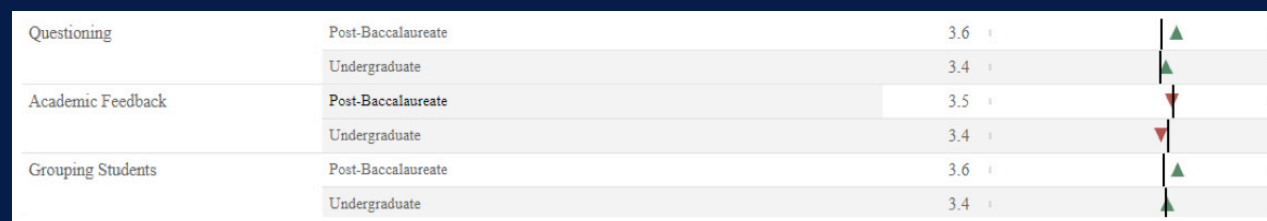
ethics. They asked a stakeholder group of professors, graduates, and school administrators and teachers rank behaviors drawn from those standards. The college developed metrics to measure the behaviors deemed most important and shared them with additional stakeholders for feedback. The final metrics were incorporated into a new dispositions rubric, and the college trained individuals responsible for assessing student on how to use it.

After collecting dispositions data through its new rubric, Milligan College leaders compared the results with similar behavioral measures available from TNAtlas—including TEAM evaluation data—to ensure consistency and reliability across college and state data sources. The college continues to review and adjust the new rubric with stakeholders to improve its implementation.

Supplementing its internal data collections with state data from TNAtlas has helped Milligan College identify and address additional challenges, including the following:

- *Low numbers of graduates with teaching endorsements in high-needs areas.* Although Milligan College could collect information about students earning endorsements in high-needs areas like math, science, and English as a Second Language (ESL), state data from the Insights Tool brought attention to the lack of graduates with these credentials. The college began requiring candidates for kindergarten through fifth grade teaching licenses to obtain a dual license for ESL. EPP leaders also reach out to professors and advisors in world languages, math, and science departments to promote teaching endorsements to students who show an interest or aptitude for teaching. Almost half of Milligan College's student teachers and interns now are pursuing endorsements in high-need areas.
- *Ineffective methods courses.* Milligan College graduates were receiving low scores for level of effectiveness on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). The college retooled its instructional methods courses so that they are taught by tenured faculty members with strong pedagogical knowledge. In 3 years, graduates' level of effectiveness scores rose from the lowest to the highest categories.
- *Lack of diversity.* Data showed historically low numbers of graduates from diverse backgrounds. With a Diversity in Teaching grant from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Milligan College expanded recruiting efforts for students

FIGURE 4. TEAM evaluation scores shown in the Insights Tool led Milligan College to revamp a course to give undergraduate and graduate teaching candidates more practical experience providing academic feedback to students.



from underrepresented groups with incentives such as reduced tuition and financial support for licensure exams. The number of student teachers and interns from underrepresented groups has increased from 3 percent to 11 percent of enrollment.

- *Low feedback scores.* Data from Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM) evaluations showed that Milligan College graduates scored below the state average on providing academic feedback to students (**FIGURE 4**). EPP leaders consulted stakeholders and are revamping a course available to both undergraduate and graduate students to offer more practical experience with giving effective feedback.

## Tennessee Tech University

Tennessee Tech University in central Tennessee is one of the largest EPPs in the state. Approximately 400 students graduate each year from its College of Education, which offers 30 initial programs and 5 advanced programs for aspiring educators.

### Insights from state data

Tennessee Tech University uses state data from TNAtlas Annual Reports in three key ways: completing CAEP accreditation requirements, working with its public school partners, and evaluating programs with its faculty.

Tennessee Tech's EPP underwent CAEP accreditation in 2018 and pulled data from the then-newly available Annual Reports to demonstrate its performance on numerous CAEP standards. Graduate performance data, survey results, and feedback from school district partners available from the state informed narratives that the EPP submitted as part of a self-study report. EPP leaders also used the multiple data sources included in the Annual Reports to triangulate performance information from its own internal data.

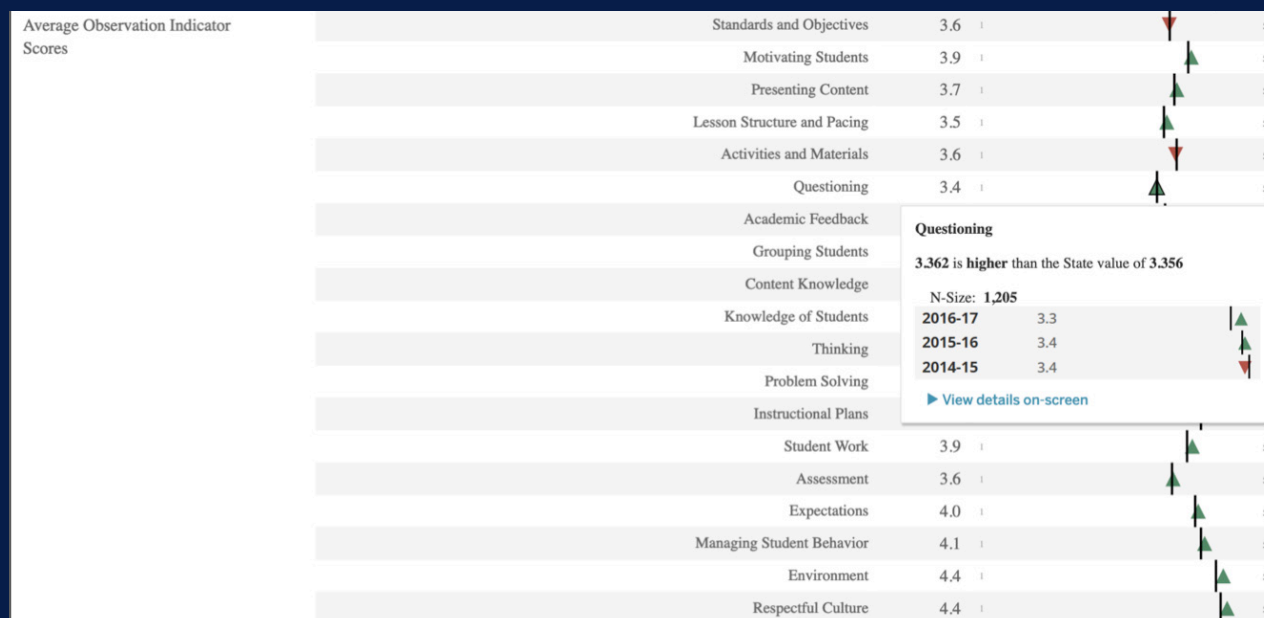
Tennessee Tech works with its prekindergarten through 12th grade (P-12) school district partners to find common low-scoring indicators on teacher observation metrics available from TNAtlas and the districts' observation data. The EPP and districts have co-created professional development resources for both teacher candidates and in-service teachers to address weaknesses shown in the data. The partners also compare value-added scores for educators from TVAAS to identify discrepancies between state and district data and to inform districts' improvement plans with statewide contextual data. Tennessee Tech reviews satisfaction survey data from its district partners and works with them to tackle challenges and celebrate successes related to preparing teachers for the classroom.

Additionally, Tennessee Tech's leaders create numerous opportunities to engage faculty members in reviewing and using TNAtlas Annual Reports data. The following state data help inform small-group discussions among the EPP's individual programs as well as conversations about the college at large:

- Admissions data help the college evaluate its program requirements and program quality.
- Teacher observation data of program completers help inform changes to course content (**FIGURE 5** on page 6).
- Level of effectiveness scores from TVAAS help faculty tailor feedback to teaching candidates so

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FIGURE 5. Observation data about Tennessee Tech graduates help the EPP track trends in its completers' performance as classroom teachers. Users can hover over data points in the online Annual Reports to see the number of students included in each aggregated score.



that it mirrors the type of feedback they can expect from school principals.

- Candidate assessment data allow the EPP to evaluate its candidates' performance relative to state averages.

The multiple data sources included in TNAtlas allow the EPP to compare results to identify weaknesses based on similar indicators across TEAM observation scores, edTPA assessments for teacher candidates, and feedback from partner school districts. When data from these sources suggested that Tennessee Tech graduates struggled with assessments, EPP leaders and faculty created a new course to focus on assessments. Within 2 years, teacher candidates' scores on assessment-related indicators improved.

## Lessons Learned

Representatives from Milligan College and Tennessee Tech University offer the following lessons learned for using data for program improvement:

### *Take advantage of state resources*

The Annual Reports data available from the Tennessee Department of Education give EPPs detailed data and statewide contextual information that support

accreditation, program reviews, and partnerships with school districts and other organizations. Supplementing EPPs' internally gathered data with state data increases transparency for internal and external stakeholders, and sharing those data with partners in both planned and unplanned settings can lead to valuable insights.

### *Remember that the improvement process is continuous*

EPPs need to focus on ongoing growth and improvement, even when programs appear to be going well. Focus groups of college representatives and stakeholders revealed strengths as well as weaknesses in areas that the college had not previously identified as issues.

### *Train new faculty*

New instructors should have a chance to learn about national and state EPP standards and to become involved in the program approval process. Curriculum changes are easier to implement when faculty understand why they are needed.

### *Build a culture of data use*

It takes time, intention, and faculty support to establish a culture of valuing and routinely using data to inform

program decisions. Schedule data review sessions to ensure that faculty members have time to review data.

### ***Do not be afraid to ask questions***

Fearing data and the issues they might reveal does not help the EPP or its students. If there are questions about a program's effectiveness, explore it with EPP data rather than waiting for problems to emerge once graduates are employed in the field.

### ***Dig into the details***

Look closely at data to understand their value as well as their limitations for assessing and improving education programs.

### ***Document and follow up on data review activities***

Keep track of decisions and proposed program changes that result from reviewing data. Once changes are in place, make sure to reassess key metrics to determine whether they are making a difference.

### ***Keep an open mind and a spirit of flexibility***

EPP approval is not just a hurdle to overcome. Understanding the purpose behind state and national standards helps the EPP address them in ways that benefit the provider and its students.

## **Additional Resources**

Milligan College  
<https://www.milligan.edu/>

SLDS Issue Brief: Addressing Teacher Labor and Teacher Quality Questions  
<https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/17558>

SLDS Webinar: Using Data to Inform and Improve Educator Preparation in Tennessee, Part I: Planning and Stakeholder Engagement  
<https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/14898>

SLDS Webinar: Using Data to Inform and Improve Educator Preparation in Tennessee, Part II: Providing Data to Stakeholders  
<https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/17486>

Tennessee Department of Education  
<https://www.tn.gov/education.html>

Tennessee Department of Education: Preparation Through Partnership: Strengthening Tennessee's New Teacher Pipeline  
<https://slds.ed.gov/#communities/pdc/documents/14125>

Tennessee Tech University  
<https://www.tntech.edu/>